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A discussion of the relationship of scholarship to teaching begins with an examination of what "Publish or Perish" does and does not mean in the English profession. The reasons for publishing and the consideration scholarship is given for salary increases and promotions are discussed. One of several conclusions made is that in spite of certain justifiable criticisms, the demand for scholarship is legitimate because it can make good teachers better and can generate an intellectual atmosphere which is essential to departments offering PhD. programs. (BN)

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The System and Its Consequences

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A paper delivered to the staff and graduate students at an informal Colloquium

by Jacob H. Adler
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Ever since it was suggested that I might be willing to talk to this group on the subject of the relationship of scholarship to teaching, I have wondered exactly what those who approached me might have been expecting. Did they expect a thorough survey of national opinions on the subject, in the nature of a well-documented term paper? If so, they should also have come armed with suggestions for how to stretch both my time and my stamina to cope with the preparation of such a project. Did they expect a closely reasoned Cartesian argument explaining clearly and distinctly -- and once and for all -- that there is an unalterable one-for-one relationship between good scholarship and good teaching? If so, they will be sadly disappointed, for I come armed neither with such logic nor -- assuming no such logic is possible -- with such prejudices. Did they anticipate an iconoclast who would denounce the system, with nostalgic reference to an idealized liberal arts college past where starry-eyed youngsters from Professor Helpful's Shakespeare class spent many a snowy evening discussing Iago's motivelessness before the professor's fireplace, to the accompaniment of hot spiced cider, soft Mozart, and the gentle breathing of a large collie dog? If so -- well, if so, what? I can be both iconoclastic and nostalgic, but (I hope) on a more selective basis.

What I am going to do is talk out of my own experience. The experience, of course, will be a little edited, because no one -- least of all, a chairman -- can afford the indiscretion of total candor. But unlike the iceberg, the unseen part will, I hope, be neither large nor dangerous, nor even especially unpredictable. And in one way or another, I shall probably be as logical, and as illogical, as conservative and as iconoclastic, as nostalgic and as futuristic -- or, in a word, as paradoxical -- as anyone could wish.

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Let us begin with the System. Publish or perish they call it, but publish or perish is the usual American exaggeration of the usual American facts. I can think of some who have published AND perished. I can think of some who have got themselves astonishing reputations, and achieved what must be monumental salaries, on an amount of publication which could not even warrant informal discussion of initiating formal discussion of considering the bare possibility of recommending promotion to associate professor here. Now doubtless there are academic graveyards. We can all name some, but none of you, I think, have the direct knowledge which has come to me through the letters I receive now and again from the person stuck in Northwest-by-North State Teachers and Mining Institute. He has been there fifteen years. He proclaims himself a fine teacher, but his very letter shouts aloud that he is as boring as the fishlike face he probably has. He has published an article or two in the local student literary magazine, and another one or two in the state historical journal. He has served on innumerable campus committees and has been faculty advisor to the college annual. He is dying on the vine; he wants out; he feels that being in a stimulating scholarly environment, one in which he did not have to teach five courses per semester, including four sections of freshman composition -- two of them remedial -- would transform him immediately into a prolific scholar and the worshipful mentor of dozens of candidates for the Ph.D. All of this is of course cruel -- his situation and my description of it. But Publish or Perish has nothing to do with it. He is in the wrong profession. He might have thrived as a bank clerk. He might even have thrived as a high school teacher, though one doubts it. Perhaps he could not have thrived at all. Not everyone -- one hopes -- at Northwest-by-North State Teachers and Mining is like him. Some of them know their limitations and do a sound job with the material

they have -- their own and the students'. With infinite and admirable pains, they push culture up a fraction of an inch. They are below the Publish-or-Perish level. The concept simply does not apply. Most of them will not even be Ph.D.'s.

Occasionally, of course, a good man is stuck in such a situation. He was attracted by the high salaries that sometimes must be paid to get any Ph.D.'s at all. He was given a tremendous teaching load, a backbreaking burden of administrative duties -- and suddenly ten years have gone by. The little work he has found time to do could have gotten him a good job had he done it in three years instead of ten. Now, barring a great stroke of luck, he is at a dead end which his original promise did not deserve. He is bitter, bored, and broken. He shouts loudly against the system. But once again the system is beside the point.

If Publish or Perish is a rule, then there are still other exceptions to it. Look at the faculty list of any sizable department in almost any state university in the country. Inevitably, you will find a number of cases of persons with rank and tenure who cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called Scholars at all, much less Scholars of Renown. This abrogation of the Publish-or-Perish Law has several causes. One, let us face it, is sentimentality, though the effect of sentimentality will vary from school to school, depending on how far sentimentality can be carried -- or concealed -- in passing a promotion and tenure recommendation through administrative channels. Another is simply that staff members -- and good ones -- are needed for certain kinds of jobs for which Scholars are not necessarily needed, and which Scholars would not, as a rule, want to undertake. But sentimentality and special non-scholarly talents are not the entire answer either. Why in a major university of unquestionable standards might one find a full professor in a traditional field whose scholarship is both scarce and paltry? I used to know a case in a school of high position. The man was still young, so long service could not account for it. He was not performing any specialized kind of service. He happened to be on the editorial staff of a scholarly journal of middling reputation, and he had published a fairly large number of book reviews. And that was literally all. For such a phenomenon no explanation will serve. And finally, one must face the fact that in certain disciplines staff is scarce. If one has a reasonably scholarly topologist, or bio-physico-chemist, or specialist in Russian economics, it might be, on occasion, the better part of wisdom to promote him rather than allow another school to lure him away. In such instance, Publish or Perish is not ignored; it is simply a teeny weeny bit deemphasized.

Now sooner or later, I will actually get around to the term Publish, but before I do, I want to go a bit further into the term Perish. I have already pointed out that there are boondocks which are highly undesirable. But this need not apply to every single boondock. And one man's boondock might be another man's Ivy League. I was invited down to Berea College a year ago last spring to speak to their English Club. Berea is far from a cultural desert, and the work it is doing for the young people from the mountains is admirable and gratifying. They have a theatre where something is going on almost all the time, and where some of what is going on is highly experimental. Their English Club was lively. The view of the mountains from their Student Center is breathtaking. Walking across their campus with one of their faculty members is a memorable experience. Every few moments he is stopped by a student, or a group of students, for eager greeting and conversation. A faculty wife told us that students are in and out of their apartment all day and well into the night for coffee, discussion, advice. In such a place, one can feel he is at the groundroots of education. He can watch the basic process at close range, and contribute daily and hourly. It must be very gratifying. One is likely to pay for it, of course, in a lower salary, in the goldfish bowl atmosphere of many small colleges, in endless paper work. At a somewhat more sophisticated level, perhaps, people were warned at Harvard when I was there not to accept positions in some of the small New England liberal arts colleges: that to do so would be to find life so very pleasant that one would never get any real work done. Maybe it's that way still. If so, it all

depends on what you want.

Now, at last, I want to turn to the Publish side. But I still want to say some negative things. I don't have the remotest idea what would be the effect if every Ph.D. in one of the sciences turned out to be a high-powered scholar. Probably in chemistry, let's say, or microbiology, there is enough for that many people to work on effectively in pushing back the frontiers of knowledge. Whether that much could be absorbed at once by the scientific world is a question; but it is an idle question, since not anywhere near all the Ph.D.'s in chemistry or microbiology are going to be major researchers. Still less are they going to be so in English. Some, as we have seen, will find themselves in an atmosphere of Non-Publish. Many will lack the temperament or the desire or the creativity. Many will publish who shouldn't. Many will publish solid, intelligent, minor work. A relative few -- and it will always be a relative few -- will be high-powered scholars or critics. Perhaps a good many more will come close. But two major facts of life will always operate to keep the total of major or close to major scholars limited: first, the nature of mankind -- the majority of people in any field of endeavor can never be truly first-rate; second, the nature of the field -- there simply is not that much truly first-rate work needing to be done in English at any given time. Only a comparative handful are going to contribute to our understanding of literature, or of a major author or genre or period, in a permanently significant way. Perhaps a larger percentage will in our day than in the days of Kittredge and his like. Perhaps not -- it depends on one's point of view. But it was T.S. Eliot, was it not, who said that what would be best remembered about twentieth century criticism is that there was so much of it.

So much of it. The writer of Proverbs little knew how right he was when he said that of the making of books there is no end. The results, as we all know, are various. One is greater and greater specialization. All one need do is look at any issue of PMLA. Regularly, inevitably, we all complain that only a minor fraction of the articles have any interest for us. Even if one turns as a specialist to so specialized a journal as Modern Fiction Studies or one of the special period issues of Studies in English Literature, there will probably be a good many articles which for him are beside the point. In 1967 MLA to all intents and purposes split its convention into two, with English meeting in one huge hotel and everything else in another huge hotel several blocks away. And in a few years MLA has grown from 9,000 members to what is it? 27,000? At any rate, according to MLA about half of its potential membership. Hence fifty or sixty thousand college teachers of modern languages and literatures. Can they all be scholars? Who would read what they wrote? Who would have time to write if he did? What would happen to specialties? We would be reduced from specialists in English literature to specialists in the eighteenth century -- that occurred a couple of generations ago -- to specialists in the Age of Pope to specialists in Pope to specialists in the Early Pope to specialists in The Rape of the Lock. This is not scholarship. Still less is it a Humane Tradition. It is insanity.

But it is the direction in which we seem to head. The demand for a college education grows and grows in America. The number of professors accordingly increaseth. The demand for publication likewise and accordingly burgeons. Being Americans, we make little attempt to limit it. If publication is demanded, there must be outlets and so the number of scholarly and critical journals grows so fast that it becomes difficult to keep up with the names of available journals, much less their content. More Universities develop Presses. More Presses develop Monograph Series. More Universities develop Ph.D. Programs in English, and hence more of them need scholars and hence more professors write more articles and more books -- and so it goes. Perhaps it is not surprising that so much that is bad escapes out of such a Pandora's box. What is surprising is that so much is at least respectably good.

One turns therefore to the question of what we publish <u>for</u>. If the primary, or only motivation, is in order not to Perish, the results are not likely to be desirable. It depends, however, upon what we mean by <u>desirable</u>. Some eminent professionals grind out more or less admirable scholarship as coldly as computers; and they are no more humane. In the sciences, this perhaps does not matter, though a world of totally inhumane scientists would be horrible to contemplate. But in our discipline it certainly does matter. We too often lose sight, it seems to me, of the fact that it is our job not only to help others to understand literature but also to help them appreciate it. Literature, we need to remember, all of us and always, is about Life. The great critics of the past, from Plato and Aristotle to Sidney and Samuel Johnson and Goethe and Wordsworth, knew this. Some critics in the twentieth century clearly know it too. Others seem to be writing for each other, spinning out puzzles, expecting to be admired as puzzlers. They resemble what Johnson had to say about metaphysical poets, meaning bad metaphysical poets. Learning, as Johnson said, can never be a total loss; but it can be put to better use. But if the obscurantist critics and the computer-like scholars publish for the wrong reasons, so, at a much lower level, do many others. Writers write who know nothing of how to be writers, much less have anything to say. The style, in other words, is bad, and the content worse: a slightly new aspect of an aspect of an aspect of something spun out in twenty books before.

Why, then, should we publish? And more importantly, perhaps, why should we demand publication? A first suggestion, always, is that publication improves teaching. And it can and it does, though with our American ideal of publishing more and more and teaching less and less to fewer and fewer, one wonders how some who voice the argument dare voice it. But it is past question true that great scholars can be great teachers. I think, for example, of Howard Mumford Jones, a ham of the first water, and of other greats in the English Department I knew at Harvard, such as Theodore Spencer and B.J. Whiting. I think probably "great scholar-fine teacher" is a normal pairing; but one must mean "<u>great</u> scholar." The cold-fish scholar I spoke of above has no time for students. Probably, if his scholarship is really valuable he should be given a research professorship and not be asked to deal with students at all.

At a lower level of learning, I know that much the same thing is true. I know very well that I am at my best as a teacher when dealing with materials upon which I have done scholarship: fuller, surer, exciting others because I myself have been excited. There are, however, two limitations to this. First, no one can be expected to have done work on everything he teaches -- not unless he is a Howard Mumford Jones. The American literature specialist who teaches the advanced surveys, for example, will hardly have worked on Franklin AND Bryant AND Cooper AND Poe AND Hawthorne AND Whitman -- and so forth and so forth. And if we want him to teach only those advanced authors on whom he <u>has</u> done scholarship, we want an impossibility -- and if it weren't an impossibility it would still be an undesirable degree of specialization. Second, what of the lower division courses we teach? Where is scholarship involved in the teaching of freshman composition, or introduction to literature, or sophomore survey? Not that it <u>can't</u> be involved, but that it rarely is, and can rarely be expected among the many who must teach such courses in addition to their more specialized duties. Does this mean that for such courses they are bad teachers? It is difficult to think so.

I would, however, accept this as truth: first, scholarship does improve teaching in most cases; second, the Great Scholar is usually a fine teacher; third, the person being trained in a highly specialized, highly advanced area certainly has the right to expect that his teacher is a scholar as well; fourth, the excitement of scholarship eagerly pursued is a significant source of stimulation in the classroom, at any level.

I think therefore that good teaching is, on the whole, a perfectly sound basis for the demand for scholarship -- with two provisos: (1) it cannot be the <u>only</u> basis

for the demand, since if scholarship is not justified by its discoveries and insights and usefulness it is not justified; and (2) scholarship cannot make bad teachers good, it can only make good teachers better. And if they perform scholarship only grudgingly and unwillingly because the system demands it -- it will make them worse.

I have said, or implied, that we can demand scholarship for the excitement it produces. This seems to me a sound and significant reason for demanding it. A department where scholarly activity is occurring among many people and on many fronts is alive and stimulating, a memorable place to be. We, as teachers, are dedicated to belief in the high and deep pleasure of intellectual activity. We are dedicated to the job of demonstrating the validity of that belief and infecting others with it. I know of no better way to do so than through the mutual excitement generated by scholarly endeavor, eagerly pursued, openly and genuinely enjoyed.

And we can demand scholarship because scholarship needs to be done. If none needed doing, then any Ph.D. program, ours or whoever's, is a hoax. We are, supposedly, training scholars, though this does not, of course, keep us from realizing that in a good many instances the supposition will turn out to be false. But scholarship needs to be done. And all scholarship, if it is done imaginatively, skillfully, precisely, and with suitable goals, is welcome. Every great author needs reinterpreting for every age. Every age produces new eminent writers who need interpretation. Our own age has produced, and is producing, new insights from other disciplines which need to be applied to literature. To be sure, there are some, perhaps many jobs which have been done and hence will not need to be done again. But there are always more; and if what we do contributes to an understanding of great literature -- whether we edit, or study an influence, or meaningfully reinterpret a poem, or apply descriptive linguistics to literary texts, or trace down an idea through its uses in a literary period, or successfully reestablish a faded reputation, or study social or historical background for the sake of literary illumination, or operate at the most esoteric levels of literary theory: if what we do contributes to an understanding of great literature, then what we do is eminently worth doing. It is not worth doing if we substitute scholarship for literature -- if we mistake means for ends. Nor should we fall into the trap of assuming a direct parallel between research in literature and research in science. For the scientist, presumably, any fact is worth knowing. For the scientist, knowledge is a goal which may be exceedingly remote from human application. But in our field, as Pope said long ago, "not to know some trifles is a praise." To spend a year discovering that Timothy Syllabub, Poetaster, was actually born in 1432 not (as had previously been thought) 1435, is hardly a worth-while endeavor. Nor should we fall into the trap that literary research can parallel scientific research in precision. It cannot. Pope said, "Follow Nature," by which he meant universal truth about human nature. But human nature is endlessly complex and various, as are the means for displaying it. Were this not true, then psychology could substitute for literature, and we could scrap <u>War and Peace</u> and <u>Hamlet</u>. Some psychologists, and perhaps some enemies in our own camp, feel that that time will come. We are dedicated to the necessity of hoping not, and of believing not. Accepting no such Brave New World, we can nevertheless accept such scientific discoveries as will be useful to our discipline, knowing as we do so that science and art are forever different; that literature is ourselves. To paraphrase something T.S. Eliot once said about literature and religion, "Literature can be no substitute for science, not merely because we need science, but because we need literature as well."

In this connection, may I point out one oddity regarding our discipline? Aside from the expectation that every English faculty worth its salt will have one creative writer upon it; and aside from a few major creative writing programs; and aside from the admirable American habit of putting major writers on its campuses with appropriate subsidies, we really do not give much aid and comfort to creative writing. I do not think this has a parallel in any of the other arts. So far as I can discover, an Art Department will be all the happier if an art historian or an art critic is also

a competent practicing painter; and a Music Department will be correspondingly gratified if a musicologist or music critic should upon occasion demonstrate competence as a composer. But in our discipline we are likely to be suspicious if a young Ph.D. pretending to scholarship should want to be a creative writer too. I suspect I am myself guilty of this prejudice when looking over applicants' credentials. We fear that a budding young assistant professor will use creative writing as a <u>substitute</u> for scholarship. A substitute, God wot! The creative writer must always be primary, and the scholar and the critic can only follow after. (This does not mean, of course, that the great critic or scholar is a lesser being than the minor creative writer.) But we English faculties nowadays are, I fear, guilty of two heresies: first, the obvious one, that contemporary scholarship and criticism are more important than contemporary literature; second, the probably unconscious feeling that since we are unable to judge the value of contemporary literature, but thoroughly capable of judging the quality of contemporary scholarship and criticism, it is safer to put the cart before the horse. It may be safer, but it is a confession of a paradoxical deficiency.

Now let's sum up. I think that the demand for scholarship is legitimate in that it can make good teachers better, in that it can generate an atmosphere of intellectual excitement profoundly desirable in a faculty, in that it is by definition essential to departments offering Ph.D. programs, and in that there is, and always will be, a very great deal of research and criticism still to be done in our discipline. One question remains: whether scholarship should loom so large in considerations of promotions, of salary increases, and of tenure. Does this not lead to the counting of items, to considerations of quantity above quality? Does it not lead to the scholar's preferring the trivial short project to the significant long one, because time is wasting and the proof must appear? Does it not lead to inadequate consideration of other aspects of a professor's contribution to his department's and university's welfare?

Obviously the answer to all these questions is sometimes Yes. But let me give you an example to the contrary from my experience as Chairman. In searching for a scholar of advanced rank to whom to offer a position in a particular field, I have on any number of occasions run into the situation where we would be delighted to offer a man an associate professorship, but he is about to be promoted to full professor -- and at a school, perhaps, exceeding our own reputation. <u>We</u> could not, and would not, offer him a full professorship, though we certainly feel that he would presently make it here, or we would not be considering him at all. What makes the difference? Precisely the fact that his own school has standards of judgment they can use besides his scholarship. The chairman there may have been made constantly aware, from student comment, of his outstanding superiority as a teacher. The man may have done much, and genuinely creative, committee work. He may have brought credit to his department by active engagement in the affairs of one of our national organizations. All of this may, indeed, be in his credentials as we receive them; but in the nature of things they cannot mean as much to us as they do to the department where he is. That department would not, presumably, be promoting him on the basis of these other things alone; but given the scholarship, they can promote him because they know of their own knowledge that these other things are there.

But as I have suggested the emphasis upon scholarship can lead to abuse. Quantity can -- and often will -- be counted instead of quality; and why not, when Podunk State can find nothing else to count? All one can do is hope -- and trust -- that one's own administrative superiors in the university where he finds himself will have both better sense and the opportunity to use it. If one finds himself in a place where this is not so, then, if one has the quality, one can move. There is no system which will insure blanket acceptance of proper standards of judgment throughout a profession. Generally speaking, one might say that bad schools and bad departments settle for quantity. Good schools, and good departments, demand quality. What one would get in an ideal world is, of course, both.

The problem of the long-term scholarly project is a more difficult one. It is unfortunate that the present academic scheme of things seems to mean that the new and ambitious Ph.D. had better get the articles, and the monograph, done soon, and let the two-volume critical study wait. One can rationalize the situation by saying that he will have more writing experience and greater maturity and wisdom when he turns to the long work which will take him four or five years to do. That is not a bad argument, though sometimes youthful brashness succeeds where mature caution fails. But there is a more adequate defense of what is admittedly not an ideal situation. The young assistant professor, anywhere, should have to prove his worth to a department within a reasonable length of time. If his department has a graduate program, then part of the proof must be in terms of scholarship. To allow him to continue as an assistant professor year after year after year after year till he turns gray with effort and frustration and his colleagues with suspense, to allow him to continue thus with a project which may never materialize, or may flop if it does, would be fair neither to him nor to his department.

There would be parallels in any field. The professional football team, forsooth, does not offer a contract to a man who only wants to play football and never has. The young trial lawyer does not get his name on the door until he has successfully defended a good many clients in a good many cases. Once the ability has been demonstrated, the risks can be taken. The football player gets a highpowered contract. The lawyer becomes a member of the firm. The assistant professor gets promotion and tenure; and thereafter if he is in a department with ordinary good sense he will keep getting the merit raises while the long-term project, like good wine, matures. He will have to teach, and he will have to advise, and he will have to serve on committees, and he will have to go to conventions. Doubtless some of this labor will be trivial; doubtless even when it is not he will find some of it frustrating. But he may not find as much of it frustrating as he is likely to claim. I think our profession will have grown in maturity when a man feels free to admit that he enjoys committee work if he does, or enjoys helping students if he does, instead of having to pretend that anything other than research (or possibly teaching) is an insufferable bore. At any rate, a man can take comfort in that these other activities are an essential duty to his profession, and that, once again, if he is in a school with sense, he is receiving due recognition and reward for performing them. Some day the big book might make a big splash. If it does, then there is no blinking the fact that his reward will probably surpass that of the man whose worth as a teacher is pure gold, but who publishes in drips rather than splashes. It is an odd paradox when you stop to think of it, that it is the scholar, not the teacher, who has visibility. But visibility isn't everything. As I have suggested, the teacher-sans-scholar, except for certain specialists and administrators, should be in the liberal arts college. The scholar-sans-teacher, if he's worth it, should have a research professorship. Obviously, the scholar-cum-teacher is the right combination. The university which is regularly willing to settle for less is an impoverished place indeed.

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